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Letter dated 26 January 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to write to you and, through you, to draw the attention of the Security Council to the recent developments in the conflict-resolution process in Abkhazia, Georgia.

At the outset, I would like to express sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his report on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, and to commend the tireless efforts of his Special Representative, Heidi Tagliavini, in seeking a long-lasting, viable and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

Clearly, today the picture we observe in the conflict-resolution process has several new elements. First, and the most recent, are the self-styled presidential elections in Abkhazia, Georgia. It is absolutely obvious that these so-called elections must be considered illegal and illegitimate. Setting aside even the most fundamental international norms, how can anyone consider the election process fair or democratic when the vast majority of the population is forced out of this region of Georgia. Here I would like to note that according to the data provided by various international organizations, approximately 100,000 inhabitants currently live in Abkhazia, Georgia, while before the conflict the population of the region was more than 500,000.

Furthermore, there is one additional aspect characterizing the situation, which is receiving less international publicity. Nevertheless, I believe that it constitutes a major legal aberration. According to Abkhaz and Russian sources, nearly 80 per cent of the population currently living on the territory controlled by the secessionist regime has Russian citizenship. These are the people who participated in the "elections", unlike others, especially those residing in the Gali region, who have been forced from "voting" stations by all available means, including physical aggression, threats, abductions, etc. (the intensity of such violence reached levels that outraged even such a person as Mr. Baburin, Deputy Speaker of the Russian Parliament). So, what does this mean? Citizens of Russia "elected" a "leader" of one of the regions in Georgia!

Isn't that an absurdity?

It was extremely interesting to follow developments after the first "elections". Obviously, the protégé of Russia and President Putin himself — at least that was

claimed on the "campaign" posters — could not live up to the expectations of his patrons and has lost the round. This triggered a chain of events that is rather interesting. Candidates were systematically summoned to high Kremlin cabinets. When persuasion failed, Moscow showed the world, including the population of Abkhazia, who really holds the reins in the region. On the eve of the so-called inauguration, Russia just closed the checkpoint on the Psou River, or, actually, did what it has been supposed to do since 1996 in accordance with numerous CIS decisions. This was followed by a "magnificent" move with the so-called Constitutional Agreement, signed, by the way, by the Deputy Prosecutor-General of the Russian Federation!

Isn't that an absurdity?

As soon as Moscow reached whatever it was aiming for (by the way, not bringing much stability to the region), the checkpoint was reopened and the railway connection resumed. Officially, the highest Russian authorities, including President Putin, are explaining these moves as the only way to avoid "civil confrontation" and bloodshed. Of course, we were and are strongly in favour of peaceful solutions, but was it not possible to make the same moves in coordination with Tbilisi? Or is it now considered bad taste to inform the capital of a friendly neighbouring country about sending envoys to one of its regions, ignoring even the basic visa regime? What shall we call observer missions sent to the "elections", which, obviously, could not be accepted as legitimate, much less in a situation where democracy is totally alien to the process?

Here I have to reiterate that despite all of the above-mentioned, the central authorities of Georgia are ready to resume negotiations with the Abkhaz side — with anybody who replaces Mr. Ardzinba. President Saakashvili stated several times that we watched the self-styled elections carefully and are ready to speak with any new leader any time. Unfortunately, we do not see readiness to do so from the Abkhaz side. Not much willingness to negotiate can be heard in the statements of the new leaders there. Undermining the conflict-resolution process further, the Abkhaz side vehemently rejects the demands of the Security Council. Namely, they still do not agree on accepting the so-called Boden document on "Basic principles for the distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi", refuse to allow the opening of the Human Rights Office in Gali, are reluctant to address the issue of teaching Georgian children in their native language and oppose full deployment of the civilian police component of UNOMIG, which, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General, operates only on the Georgian side, where it has "good cooperation with local law enforcement agencies".

It is rather sad, but still a reality, that we witness Security Council resolutions becoming just blank papers. It seems that only the Georgian side takes them seriously, while Abkhazis totally reject them (why not? — there is no consequent response to their stubbornness).

It has to be mentioned that the international format of negotiations was also lax in the wake of the self-styled elections. The Geneva process, which brought hope that progress in conflict-resolution could take place, is at risk of becoming just a discussion club. Some symptoms of such a dangerous development are already visible — previously discussed task groups have simply been lost, and the necessity to transfer the Boden paper to the Abkhaz side was not even mentioned at the last

meeting. We believe that Geneva process should be dynamic and results-oriented. It is inadmissible to emasculate the forum.

I still have to recall that there is a category of people whom we all have to keep in our minds. These are refugees and IDPs — victims of ethnic cleansing — who already for longer than a decade are waiting for their basic right — the right to live at home — to materialize. They still live in miserable conditions, totally insecure and vulnerable. Events that took place in the Gali region this month have demonstrated once again the lawlessness that they face. I think that members of the Security Council are aware of abductions that happened on "election" day. Actually, these excesses were committed in front of CIS peacekeepers, who did nothing to protect peaceful civilian people — by the way, not for the first time. In fact, after the ceasefire in 1994, over 2,000 Georgians were killed in the Gali security zone, which falls under the responsibility of the CIS peacekeeping force. I have to state once more that the CIS peacekeeping force is rather far from being impartial and is often backing Abkhaz separatist paramilitary structures. I think it is high time to start thinking of a new form of peacekeeping operation, as the activities of a Russian military contingent — which the CIS peacekeeping force, in fact, is — could hardly be considered a "peacekeeping operation".

I have to draw your attention to one additional alarming development. Russian military schools openly set — as publicized by Abkhaz and Russian media — special quotas and prepare military personnel for a secessionist regime. I would like to recall that Security Council resolution 876 (1993) clearly opposes such actions. Obviously, not everybody in Russia honours the decisions of the United Nations Security Council.

The Russian military base in Gudauta (in Abkhazia, Georgia), which is a foreign military base on the conflict territory, had to be disbanded and closed in 2001. Despite international obligations, this base, though downsized, still operates. We, on several occasions, have proposed to hand over the base to UNOMIG, thus, obviously, helping the Mission in its hard everyday operations. Unfortunately, the decision on this issue is constantly delayed.

Finally, I would like to sound an alarm — the longer this protracted "frozen" conflict remains unresolved, the more difficult it will be to find a compromise for long-lasting peace. Therefore, we wholeheartedly invite the Security Council to foster its involvement in the conflict-resolution process in Abkhazia, Georgia. One of the steps that the Security Council could take at this stage would be a field visit to Georgia — particularly to Sukhumi — to learn first-hand the reality on the ground and try to get out of the stalemate in the conflict-resolution process.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Revaz **Adamia**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative